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ABSTRACT

Teachers can match content reading materials with student needs and abilities in a number of ways. If textbooks are the main or only source, teachers can group students according to textbook difficulty, conduct student surveys of specific topics in the textbook, and use the textbook as a sampler or starting point for more in-depth studies of topics. Teachers can also use a multitext approach, offering students a variety of combinations of materials. The multitext approach would include classroom news magazines such as "Current Events" or "Senior Scholastic," a classroom clipping file of mass media articles on content subjects, anthologies like the "Reader's Digest Science Readers," ancillary books that were previously considered "outside reading," high interest/low vocabulary books, commercial magazines of interest to children and adolescents, reference books, encyclopedias, and books of facts. By providing students with a wide variety of reading materials at varying reading levels, teachers enable all their students to enjoy reading as a learning activity. (RL)

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HOW CAN THE CLASSROOM TEACHER MATCH CONTENT AREA READING MATERIALS WITH THE NEEDS AND ABILITIES OF STUDENTS ?

Robert Aukerman

Inasmuch as reading is the common denominator of learning in most academic areas, we have come to think of the textbook as the sole reading resource. Yet, given the many alternatives we have today, the textbook must be considered as only one of many reading resources. We should, consequently, not rely on it exclusively; neither should we discard it. Let us first, therefore, consider how we may match textbook content to the needs and abilities of learners:

1. Grouping Via Textbook Difficulty

It is common practice for each classroom to have a whole-class textbook, regardless of whether the students in the class can read that particular book. Assuming this to be the case: one textbook and a heterogeneous group of learners, does it make sense to use that text anyway? Of course not.

Here is a suggestion that works:

Xerox a paragraph from the text that has not been read by the students. Devise ten questions (if possible), consisting of three factual recall questions, two true-false questions, three fill-in-the-blanks questions, and two

insight questions (cause-and-effect; implied meanings, etc).

Give the paragraph and questions to every student as a "test" of reading ability of that particular textual materials. Note the speedof each student and multiply it by the percentage of accuracy in answering the questions. This will give you each student's ability on that particular text.

You then separate the students into groups: those that have ability in the top 25%; those with abilities in the middle 50%; and those in the bottom 25%. Using your best judgment and this gross estimate of their abilities, you can decide, perhaps, that the middle 50% can successfully use the text while those in the upper and lower quartiles must have some textual materials more appropriate to their abilities.

Probably you cannot get different texts for those in the upper and lower groups right away, if ever. What do you do then?

You have three groups, but all three can be brought together for the textbook survey, which is the subject of the next suggestion.

2. Survey Via Textbook

Here is what happens:

The objective is to provide each student with the means ofor developing his/her own overview of the particular subject presented in the chapter. In home economics it could be "Energy Conservation"; in geography, it could be "The Great Plains"; in biology, it might be " Genes"; etc.

Whatever the topic, there are bound to be

Whatever the topic, there are bound to be sub-topics; related subjects; details; main ideas; cause-and-effect relationships; etc. These are easily noted through the survey technique, provided the teacher provides special help for the bottom group and extra challenge for the top group.

Here is one way to make the survey effective for all:

Each student has his/her textbook; the same for everyone. The teacher conducts a whole-class discussion that has been planned beforehand. In the planning, the teacher has Xeroxed all pages of the textual chapter. Inasmuch as textbook pages are usually smaller than standard 8½X11 paper, there is plenty of marginal space for inserting notes.

Even though you may all be acquainted with the survey technique, I will run through it here to illustrate the planning that assures success. (It doesn't "just happen".)

Planning the Survey of the Chapter Topic

The following elements are to be noted in the planning and in the survey session:

Main title of chapter.

make notes on various implications or meanings.

Read introduction to class

The teacher may do this, or plan for some specific student (good reader) to do this.

Review, summarize, and restate main idea and general concepts of introduction.

This should all be noted by the teacher in preparation for the group discussion.

The probable answers or ideas that will be suggested by the students in the class will have been anticipated by the teacher.

Each sub-heading will be read by specific students who have been named in the margins of the Xerox pages. In this manner, poor readers can read simple, easy heads, and the better readers can read and comment on the more complicated and/or more abstract headings; all preplanned.

Wherever an illustration, chart, map, diagram, picture has been included in the text, specific students should have been selected (and names noted) to read the captions below the illustrations and to suggest their relevance to the main topic. This, too, is preplanned so students at the several levels of ability will be able to succeed when matched with materials at their ability levels.

On the teacher's Xerox copy, specialized vocabulary should be noted and plans made to reproduce that vocabulary either on the chalkboard or on strips of tagboard prior to the survey lesson.

Later on, the vocabulary will be learned in the context of the chapter topic and will be used in sentences written by thestudents. Each sentence should be related to the chapter topic. Here, again, the teacher should anticipate several possible sentences in which the vocabulary words might be used.

Important people mentioned in the chapter (and perhaps illustrated in portraits or in situations0

are also noted in the margin by the teacher and their names printed on the chalkboard or on strips of tagboard.

Later on, the contributions of those famous people are learned in connection with the topic of the chapter.

A summary (pre-planned) may now be made by the teacher, with the help of class discussion. This will include references to the (pre-planned) oaktag sub-headings, vocabulary, and famous persons. These visuals will all be assembled on the felt-board or chalkboard in the survey-outline. Everyone in the class, regardless of reading ability, has taken part in developing the survey and has been exposed to the main ideas, sub topics, vocabulary, important persons names, and has, perhaps, contributed an idea or suggestion related to the main topic of the survey.

Having completed this survey of a topic, using the text as the resource, all students can see relationships of cause and effect; details supporting maind ideas; factors, such as people and natural resources; and the extent of the topic and its related sub-topics.

At this point, each student has been "readied" for reading about and within the topic. The nature and amount of reading will be largely determined by each student's interest in the topic or in a particular facet of the topic. The type of reading will be limited only by the availability ofmaterials at several levels of difficulty.

The survey via textbook has been completed. What outcomes might we anticipate?

3. The textbook as a "Sampler".

Any textbook is a sampler of but a small fraction of the accumulated knowledge about a topic. This should be made clear to students.

Is it not reasonable, therefore, that students should have the right to sample; to select those facets of a topic that appeal most to them? How does this work ?

Each student has a copy of the text. The poorest readers have, with the help of the preview, acquainted themselves with some of the sub-topics. They can find these again in the textbook either by identifying sub-topic headings and/or through illustrations. They can then make a list of a few topics they prefer to investigate. Those students in the middle group may wish to use only the textbook, inasmuch as they have proved that they can read it without much problem and it is readily available. They can read those parts that appeal to them. Having sampled the sub-topics in this manner, they may select one or several for in-depth study in materials outside the text. Similarly, the best readers may wish to read in the text and/or skim the text as a basis for deciding on special topics to investigate more in depth.

As a "sampler", thus, the textbook provides merely an introduction (a smattering of information) on topics, some of which are of far more interest or relevance to one student than to others. The textbook is like a smorgasbord, providing a broad outlay of sub-topics to be sampled, with the opportunity to partake more on those that have the greatest appeal.

4. Multi-Texts

It may appear to be unrealistic in this period of restricted budgets to suggest that schools acquire multi-texts on the same topic, but written at different levels of difficulty.

There are several readability formulas that may be used to give a rough estimate of the difficulty of several comparative texts. The Fry formula is, perhaps, the most popular and is easy to use. It is reproduced here through the courtesy of Dr. Edward Fry and the International Reading Association. If one wishes to be more definitive in making the comparison of texts to determine which is more difficult and which is easiest, these are the additional factors to assess and compare:

length of sentences

number of complex sentences in a given length of textual material.

amount of difficult vocabulary (in addition to the technical vocabulary of the topic).

incidence of abstract ideas and concepts.

There are other factors of readability, but those listed above are sufficient to consider when making a gross determination of the difficulty of each possible text and in selecting several texts for a heterogeneously-grouped class.

In spite of restricted budgets, textbooks do need to be replaced. When that time comes, the teacher or academic department that is attempting to provide content

learning for students who have a wide spectrum of reading abilities should make a positive effort to acquire at least two (and, ideally, three) textbooks, the total of which would be but a very small number greater than had but one text been acquired for each potential student.

For your classes, how many at each level would it be wise to acquire?

You can answer this only by estimating, on the basis of past years, how many students of high, medium and low reading abilities you have had at any one time. Doubtless, there have been times when the majority of your pupils appeared to be in the lowest reading group. You might, therefore, need 20 copies of the easiest text, 20 of the average , and ten of the more difficult. If you are in a department where there are other teachers teaching the same subject, it makes ordering more easy, and the totals of texts necessary at each level may be better proportioned by sharing and shifting texts between classes.

With a supply of multi texts, several things can be done that are not possible with one text. For example, three different surveys can be devised and compared to see which topics seem to be important to all three authors. More able students can sample parts of the easier texts for more relaxed reading of certain topics. Students can compare the depth and breadth of treatment given by one book compared with the others. Similarly, comparisons can be made of the manner in which controversial subjects are treated by each author. Many in-depth conclusions

may be arrived at by such comparisons, using multi-texts as the media.

Classroom News Magazines

Fortunately, there are at least two major groups of classroom periodicalsavailable at several levels of reading difficulty, but, at the secondary level, covering essentially the same content in each particular issue. One group of classroom newspapers has been known for many years as "Current Events", even though the titles of the various publications have extended beyond that. The other group of publications is commonly known as "Scholastics".

1. <u>The "Current Events" Group</u>.

Xerox Education Publications of Columbus, Ohio publishes the following news magazines for secondary students bi-weekly during the academic year:

<u>Current Events</u> will be commencing its 79th year of publication next September. It is designed for junior high school students with "average" reading ability. It is primarily a social studies periodical, with contents of every issue categorized under USA, World, U.S.History, a news cartoon, US news, and world news and frequently a map pictorializing some current issue. In addition to this major thrust, it contains very brief feature departments dealing with sports, TV, careers, and a psychological observation by Dr. Steve Bank .

Current Science is a news magazine that starts its 65th year in September. It surveys the latest in science news from all over the globe and, to make it more interesting, includes science experiments, puzzles jokes, and cartoons. This mix is aimed at junior high students.

For students with low reading ability, Xerox Education Publications provides two weekly periodicals: Know Your World Extra (written at the 2nd and 3rd grade reading level) and You and Your World (3rd to 5th grade reading level). The contents of these two publications usually include current news features, cars, stars, sports, finance, and an occasional short story.

Read Magazine is published twice a month for English classes. It contains articles, stories, poems, and plays at the junior high interest level and is written "at level" for "average" readers.

Scholastic's classroom publications cover a wider range than the Weekly Reader (Xerox Education Publications) offerings described above. The comprise the following:

There are three Scholastic news magazines (published bi-weekly) in the field of the social studies:

Junior Scholastic covers current events, world cultures, andU.S. history at the junior high level of readability and interest.

Senior Scholastic does a similar job for senior high students, with special emphasis on their roles as citizens and consumers.

Scholastic Search is written as a high interest-low readability publication specially designed for American History classes, but contains interesting features on television, word puzzles, sports, movie reviews, rock music,

For English classes, Scholastic Scope (a weekly) provides reading materials at 4th to 6th grade level for senior high students, whereas Literary Cavalcade provides contemporary plays, stories, and poems monthly for better readers.

Art and Man is Scholastic's news magazine for senior high school students. It is written "at level" and is published monthly (six issues) during the school year.

Scholastic Science World is somewhat similar to Xerox's Current Science . It is published bi-weekly for "average readers in the senior high grades.

Co-ed has been published monthly for many years as a high interest periodical in the home economics field. It features personal development, grooming, health, family relationships, careers, nutrition,and family living.

Scholastic Wheels, (published quarterly) keeps students up to date on safe and efficient driver techniques, auto maintenance, car fads and facts, etc. It is for high interest-average reading ability students in the senior high school.

Inasmuch as these Xerox publications and Scholastic magazines are written specially for junior and senior high students, it is a relatively simple task to match these reading materials to the interests and reading abilities of students. In the event that you are in a field where there is no news magazine designed specifically for it, it is still possible to develop some cut-and-paste magazines of your own from articles in other magazines. This takes considerable effort and time, but it has been done successfully. Here is what one must do:

Collect articles from many sources, but only those that have high interest and average or low readability.

If the articles run on pages back to back, the back-sides of the page will have to be Xeroxed.

Assemble the printed materials neatly on the page. This may require a cut-and-paste job to plan a balanced layout and an extra-wide margin for binding.

After each article has been assembled, have the pages Xeroxed back-to-back in real magazine form and bind the Xeroxed pages into"term paper"binders. The number of articles in each binser will depend upon the way you intend to use the. and/or the subject. The use of term paper binders makes it possible to add new articles as you discover them. It also makes it possible to discard obsolete articles and replace them with newer items.

Classroom Clipping File

When it does not seem feasable to devise a news-magazine on particular subjects, it may be more useful to develop clipping files.

Although the name may imply that the teacher has a series of manila folders with an assortment of clippings thrown into each, this is not a very efficient way to handle clippings. It is much better if they are assembled onto 8½ X 11 papers and Xeroxed for filing.

The topics in the clipping file can be sequenced and cross-referenced to correspond to similar topics in the textbook. In many instances, a remarkable file can be assembled in the space of three or four years.

Because the articles or items are often written with some human interest feature, they provide students with more relevant viewpoints than the more staid and structured presentation of facts found in many textbooks.

One advantage of clipping file articles is that comprehension questions may be Xeroxed onto the back and each student can take an individualized test. Special vocabulary may also be noted and vocabulary exercises may be indicated on separate sheets.

The classroom clipping file is a resource that needs to be more positively considered and more actively pursued by classroom teachers who wish to match reading materials with the interests and abilities of students.

Anthologies

We usually think of anthologies as collections of literary excerpts in English classes. There can be anthologies of articles in any subject-matter field. A few examples should suffice to illustrate anthologies in such fields as social studies, science, sports, music, arts, home economics, careers, etc.

Reader's Digest Social Science Readers

These booklets (Reader's Digest size and format) of about 125 pages each, provide anthologies (collections) of articles, newspaper excerpts, poems, short stories, plays, cartoons, etc., structured under four categories: family, community, nation, and world. A glossary is provided in each reader. Each reader presents an anthology of materials written and/or rewritten at a particular reading level, commencing with grade 2 reading level through reading level 6. The interest levels range from junior high through senior high.

Reader's Digest Science Readers

These are anthologies of reading materials ranging from third grade reading level through sixth grade reading levels, with interest levels from junior high school upwards.

Read Magazine

Read was already noted when we discussed Xerox Education Publications. It can be considered an anthology (published bi-weekly) for junior high English classes.

Content Skills Series

Jamestown Publishers of Providence, Rhode Island markets five booklets that may be considered anthologies in English, social studies, mathematics, science, and practical arts. Each booklet (approximately 100 pages in length) contains original articles of explanatory discourse, followed by comprehension tests of vocabulary, literal facts, interpretation, and application. These content area readers are available for secondary school use at two levels of readability, "middle" and "advanced".

Reading Anthology (Scholastic Scope)

The Scope English Program includes three levels (grades 7 through 9) of materials collected into Reading Anthologies. The works at each level are grouped according to theme or author. Each anthology is approximately 320 pages of fiction, non-fiction, poems, and plays rewritten to 4th to 6th grade reading levels. After each grouping (acutally similar to a unit) there are questions and activities dealing with comprehension, vocabulary building, understanding literary forms, etc.

Contact

The anthologies marketed under the name, Contact, by Scholastic are designed for senior high students with less-than-avdrage reading abilities. The several [illegible] anthologies are briefly noted:

Humor: Making People Laugh explores what is funny

through dialogs, jokes, limericks, short stories, and non-fiction by famous comedy writers and comedians.

Movies: The Magic of Films is an anthology of excerpts from seven films, together with articles on how movies are made, dialogs, how ratings are developed, etc.

TV: Behind the Tube contains fiction, plays, cartoons, comic strips, and articles on TV and its influence on people. This anthology is excellent for a class in communications.

Values: What's Important to You ? explores this basic theme through short stories [illegible] biography (by superstar, Walt Frazier), articles,and plays.

Getting Together: Problems You Face is a collection of articles, plays, letters, and stories excerpted from Scholastic Scope Magazine's teenage advice column. This anthology is appropriate for use in home economics personal development classes.

Contact Series III: Society

There are ten anthologies in this series, all designed for the senior high school social studies. The titles should be sufficient to convey to the reader the nature of their content:

Loyalties: Whose Side Are You On ?

Maturity: Growing Up Strong

Crime and Society: The Challenge We Face

Sports: A Mirror of Our Society?

Drugs: Insights and Illusions

Environment: Earth in Crisis

The Future: Can We Shape It ?

Law: You, The Police, and Justice

Prejudice: The Invisible Wall

This Land is Our Land: The American Dream

All of the anthologies in the Contact series may be purchased separately or in packaged units which include logbooks (workbooks), poster sets, sound filmstrips, and teachers guides.

How are Anthologies Used ?

It should be obvious that collections of related and relevant materials can add immeasurably to students' interest in subject matter reading. Unlike textbooks, anthologies draw upon the real life experiences of people, many of whom are known as "stars" by youth. Moreover, the variety of materials presented through anthologies such as those mentioned above provides students with a magazine format rather than a textbook format. Anthologies ar customarily much shorter than textbooks and the selections were written to entertain as well as to inform. The articles in anthologies can convey contrasting viewpoints on relevant controversial problems in a realistic and up-to-date manner, whereas a textbook must remain more netural, stating only the facts. Anthologies therefore, serve as resources for discussion of problems and for problem solving.

Ancillary Books

Every subject-matter field has numerous books that used to be "assigned" as "outside reading". Today, many such extra sources of content reading materials are known as:

Hi-Lo Books

These are books of high interest, but written at low levels of readability. Most Hi-Lo books carry both interest and reading level designations. Many Hi-Lo books are published in series. Time and space do not permit description or even mention of the many excellent Hi-Lo books available today. Just a few should serve to illustrate the nature of this valuable resource for content area reading:

Pacemaker True Adventures (Fearon-Pitman publishers)

Exciting adventure stories of important historical figures. 11 books.

Action Library (Scholastic).

40 paperbacks. Excellent stories of adventure, sports, romance, mystery in a variety of economic and cultural settings

American West Series (Fearon-Pitman)

Three anthologies of biographical vignettes of characters in the westward movement in American History.

Firebird Collection (Scholastic)

Ten books in American history showing the contribution of minorities.

Turning Point (McCormick-Mathers)

This is a series of ten books especially good for junior high girls in home economics and English. Very low readability levels.

Young Adventurers Series (Bowmar)

Exciting and contemporary teen-age experiences are described in these six books.

Dodd, Mead & Co's Hi-Lo Books

The publish three categories: sports biographies, the supernatural, and mystery and suspense. The latter are written by Dan Cohen whose latest, MISSING ! Stories of Strange Disappearances are all true cases. One of the books, Modern Women Superstars provides biographical sketches of six top women superstars in sports.

Crestwood House is a new publishing effort that is providing an unusually fine and diverse array of hi-lo series books. The Spotlight Series is notable with biographies of celebrities in Nashville Music, TV, Soul, Comedy, the Beatles, etc. Other series of special interest to high school students are: Sports Champions, Racing, Winner's Circle, Focus on Women, Monsters, and about ten others.

Children's Press has achieved a notable spot in producing fine books at low readability. One of their newest series is directed toward junior high school students who have but 1st or 2nd grade reading ability, with [illegible] paperback titles, Skateboard Mania, Soap Box Racing, etc. Each book is designed like a preprimer or primer with no more that two or three simple sentences per page.

Sports Star Series is a new entry by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and features Nadia Comaneci, Chris Evert, Walt Frazier, Pele', and ten other superstars. The books are published in library bindings and paperback.

EMC Corporation has published a new collection of books that provide biographies of outstanding achievers of our time whose success should inspire junior and senior high students. Among the titles are Henry Winkler, Gabriel Kaplan, Tracy Austin, Janet Guthrie, Rod Carew, Andrew Young and eight or ten others. The series is called Headliners. This publisher also offer us two series in the performing arts: Center Stage and Behind the Bright Lights. The contemporary biographies are written at 4th and 5th grade level of difficulty. Hispanic Heroes of the USA consists of four books of biographies of twelve achieving, succeeding Americans of Hispabic heritage. A similar series is titled Black American Athletes. These series are written at 4th grade readability. Another series of four books provides biographies of sixteen Women Who Win, written at Fifth Grade reading level.

Steck-Vaughn Company has recently introduced 8½ X 11 paperbacks, each containing a collection of 15 biographies of Superstars of Rock, Superstars of Movies and TV, Superstars of Country Music, and Superstars of Soul. The books were written at 5th to 6th grade levels for Junior High students and senior high students with low reading ability.

Reference Books

No content area reading program would be complete without a collection of reference books. This is especially important for the better students who want to explore subjects more deeply and to follow related subjects.

Encyclopedias and information manuals give the best promise in this field.

Encyclopedias

The headings and sub-headings in encyclopedia articles serve as guides for organizing information and as keys to cross referencing and further investigation. In many instances these are set in bold-face type. Let us suppose that a student in science has commenced a search for information on insects . At the end of a lengthy article on insects, the encyclopedia also will contain a notation something like this:

See also:

ant	cockroach
aphid	caterpillar
bedbug	etc.,
bug	etc.
bumblebee	
butterfly	

Articles in the encyclopedia will also help the serious reader develop a logical outline of the components of the subject being studied, for example:

A. Insects
   varieties
B. Importance of Insects
   beneficial or harmful
   chemical control
C. Bodily structure
D. Senses
E. Life Cycle
   reproduction
F. Ways of Insects
   social structure
G. Orders of insects

that
The newer encyclopedias are designed for junior and senior high students are magnificent publications, printed in full color, and costing millions of dollars to produce. Their use in the content area classroom will add a significant dimension to the academic achievement of average and above average readers.

The encyclopedia habit opens the entire world of knowledge and entices young people to want to read and read and read .

Books of Facts

Like encyclopedias, books of facts, contain enormous amounts of information, but arranged in less exciting format. Nevertheless, books of facts appeal to a certain segment of students who waht to accumulate information essentially for "information's sake". For them, reading and memorizing are synonymous. Their interests and needs can be matched with such publications as the World Book of Facts, The Guinness Book of World Records, Sports Illustrated, etc.

Teen Magazines

Teen agers have an insatiable hunger for facts about their heroes and heroines. That need is matched with an incredable collection of teen mags that are published with such groovy titles as:

Tiger Beat, Teen, Teen Spectacular, Teen Fever, Teen Bag, Teen Beat, Teen Life, Super Teen , Cream, Rock, Rock Love, Kiss, and doubtless scores of others.

These appeal to the 8th and 9th graders who

want to internalize every last detail concerning the "secret" lives of their idols. To achieve this goal, they pay out $1 and $1.25 regularly to acquire the teen equivalent of True Romances.

Older teenagers of highschool rank are more apt to spend their money on more sophisticated periodicals specializing on surfing, ballooning, wheels, hot rods, clothes, sports in general, etc.

In any case, these specialized magazines are supersaturated with information and are a real part of the lives of todays youth. Unfortunately, many content area teachers have not "kept with it" and are ignorant of these needs and resources in content area reading.

Conclusions

How Can the Classroom Teacher Match Content Area Reading Materials with the Needs and Abilities of Students ?

There are several needs and abilities found among any group of children or youth in a classroom, and reading materials must be tailored to those needs and abilities. Specifically, The concept levels of the reading materials are to be related to intellectual ability. Students with low intellectual ability deal most easily with concrete concepts, whereas those with high I.Qs can handle more sophisticated and more abstract ideas. This is a point of beginning.

A second consideration is student interests.

In selecting reading materials in any content area, we must ask ourselves, "Which specific aspects of my content area do students already have some interest?" For example, in science, what are ninth-graders most interested in? In home economics, for example, young people are interested in the radioactive fallout that is a potential in the use of microwave ovens. This is a starting point in the discussion of consumer protection, product safety, and government standards for protection. Isn't this a much more productive way to commence than by expecting students to read about government regulatory agencies. The psychological principle of learning is that learning proceeds from the known to the unknown.

In every content area, young people today are knowledgeable about some things and, indeed, are genuinely interested in debates over controversial issues. These are the springboards for reading to find out answers to questions, to clarify misconceptions, and/or to support points of view.

The third factor that is an essential part of the selection process is the reading abilities of the students. It is far better to provide easier reading materials so students may enjoy their search for facts and information than to expect them to read materials that are at the frustration level of difficulty.

Unfortunately, many content area reading materials are not graded according to readability (difficulty). Judgments must then be made by teachers as students are

observed reading the materials.

Finally, if we believe what we preach about providing for individual differences, we will provide in our content area classrooms a wide variety of reading materials that are written within a wide range of reading difficulty, thus matching them to the needs and abilities of the students.